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Wall, Edward Clarence

Two letters by E.C. Wall of Milwaukee, Wis.

[Milwaukee]

[1899]

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TWO LETTERS

BY

E. C. WALL,

OF MILWAUKEE, WIS.

ON THE QUESTION OF

SIXTEEN TO ONE.

Westlake, DelaHunt & Smith Co., Printers

1894

LIBRARY OF
THE REFORM CLUB
SOUND CURRENCY COMMITTEE,
52 William St., New York.

MANITOWOC, WIS., Jan. 9, 1899.

DEAR MR. WALL:

Since the election of 1898, democrats throughout the state have been discussing what the party's action in the future on the financial question should be. These discussions in the main have been temperate, earnest, and conducted with a purpose to reach conclusions which shall restore harmony in the party while conserving its fundamental principles.

Your counsel has always been sought when a line of policy was in dispute or when active and intelligent service in the party's behalf was necessary. The present time presents conditions which invite an expression of your views as to what action the next Democratic National Convention should take on the money question. May I ask that you will favor the Democrats of the state with your opinions on this matter? Respectfully yours,

JOHN NAGLE.

MILWAUKEE, WIS., Jan. 14, 1899.

Mr. John Nagle,
Editor Manitowoc Pilot, Manitowoc, Wis.

MY DEAR MR. NAGLE:

Your very courteous letter of the 9th inst. has been received, in which you invite an expression of my views as to what the probable action of the next Democratic National Convention will be on the money question.

I wish I could answer your question or make a prediction that would be satisfactory even to myself. I cannot, and have doubts if I will actively participate in the next National campaign.

While my views on the subject referred to in your letter are of no interest to the public and will exert no influence with the convention, still, being a Democrat who has the advancement of the principles of his party at heart, there can be no impropriety in stating the views I entertain as to the proper policy that should be proclaimed by the next National Convention.

The question is one I gave thoughtful consideration to long ago, particularly relating to what should be my personal conduct, provided the next National Convention re-iterated in its platform the declaration of 1896 in favor of silver coinage at the ratio of sixteen to one, and resulted in the following letter being written to Senator Jones, Chairman of the National Democratic Committee:

MILWAUKEE, WIS., June 21st, 1898.

Hon. Jas. K. Jones,
Chairman National Democratic Committee.

MY DEAR SENATOR JONES:

As I have definitely determined never again to be connected with the management of a National Campaign that has a declaration in the platform on the money question in favor of the coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1, I am in doubt if it is proper for me longer, for this reason, to remain a member of the National Committee.

It seems to me right before acting to consult you. I am,
Very respectfully, yours truly,

EDWARD C. WALL.

I have avoided making public heretofore the views herein expressed, believing the time until now inopportune to debate the platform that should be adopted by the next convention. Believing that discussion is now in order and should be encouraged, I welcome the occasion you give me to make an objection to an error in the National platform of 1896.

It is my belief that the doctrine of sixteen to one is neither Democratic nor a sound business proposition, but is in fact entirely opposite to both. I, with many others, accepted the platform of 1896, not because of that declaration, but notwithstanding it, and at this time it seems proper for me to enter, as I now do, my protest as a Democrat against a repetition of that mistake.

If the leaders who will control the next National Democratic Convention insist upon its declaring that the doctrine of sixteen to one is an article of faith that must be accepted and promulgated by Democrats, I ask to be excused from active participation in the next National campaign. It is not my intention however to withdraw from the Democratic party. Its principles have been and are still very dear to me. I can wait until the time arrives when this grievous error is abandoned and wiser councils prevail. I make no protest against the rest of the platform of 1896, and for Mr. Bryan, the nominee for president at that time, I have the very highest respect, knowing he is a sincere, honest and fearless man.

The legislation of this country has been drifting from the fundamental principles on which the government was founded, and Democratic doctrine seems to have been largely lost sight of. I hope, however, that the day is not so remote when the great and fundamental truths of Democracy will prevail and our party be restored to the management of the government with a chief executive thoroughly grounded in Democratic principles and steadfast to uphold them to the end.

If this brief personal statement without reasons or arguments answers your question satisfactorily, this letter is for you to use as you desire.

Thanking you for the uniform fairness I have received at your hands for many years, notwithstanding our radical difference of opinion at times, I am,

Very respectfully,

E. C. WALL.

(*The following letter appeared in the Milwaukee papers.*)

MILWAUKEE, WIS., Feb. 7th, 1899.

TO THE EDITOR:

It was not my intention when I recently wrote Mr. Nagle to be drawn into discussion of the money question, nor did I suppose I would receive so many letters of condemnation nor such severe and unfair newspaper criticisms as has been the case.

From the tone of many letters I have received and newspaper comments that have been brought to my attention, it seems that some people are so fanatical on the silver question that to doubt the wisdom, propriety or expediency of retaining in the next National platform the declaration in favor of 16 to 1 is regarded as disloyal, and that whosoever expresses such a doubt must be read out of the Democratic party and seek an asylum with the Republicans or the Gold Democrats. For one I do not propose to be read out of the Democratic party, and I shall not join the Republican party nor cast my lot with the Gold Democrats. I purpose to stay on the Democratic ship, and I challenge the right and deny the power of any man or set of men to throw me overboard. There I will remain and for the principles that I believe to be Democratic I will lift up my voice, and if I am over-ridden by a majority of my fellow Democrats I can acquiesce, but claim the right to retire from active participation in promulgating views that I regard as un-Democratic, unwise, unbusinesslike and inexpedient.

I am no less a Democrat now than I have ever been.

I contend that there is no more opportune time for discussion and exchange of views than the period preceding the meeting of the National Convention, and that every Democrat has a right to express his opinions as to what course in his judgment should be pursued by his party and to fight for his individual views when the next convention meets, and if possible have such articles as appear objectionable and inexpedient eliminated from the next platform.

A Democratic National Convention certainly is not held for the simple purpose of re-affirming the platform of a former convention or ratifying the opinions of any man or set of men.

My own opinion in regard to the money question has undergone no change for many years. I was opposed to the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1 previous to the convention of 1896. As a loyal Democrat and a believer in parties and party discipline, I accepted the determination of that convention, explaining briefly in an interview my reasons therefor, and have since done all in my power to advance the cause of the Democratic party, expressing no public opinion contrary to the declarations of the National platform.

At this time I claim the right as a Democrat and as a preliminary to the meeting of the next National Convention, to enter my protest against including in the next National platform such matters as appear to me un-Democratic, unwise and inexpedient.

I am not in sympathy with any attempt to hide the money question behind issues, new or old.

It is not so much a question of what the standard of value shall be as of what the standard of value *is*. It is established irrevocably by commercial usages and the regular laws of trade, and cannot and will not be controlled by legislation contrary to those great laws.

Business could probably be done just as well with silver as with gold as the standard of value, if it were accepted by all the business world. But it is not, and any attempt made by legislation to force trade and commerce to a standard that is not universally recognized, will create endless trouble, annoyance and loss to the masses, and after all, if a new basis were accepted and quiet restored, it would be found that the masses had not become the gainers, and the control of money as firmly centralized under the new system as under the old.

Perhaps no Goldbugs would remain; maybe some Silverbugs would be substituted.

I know that because at the election in 1896 Mr. Bryan received the largest vote that was ever cast for any Democratic president prior to that time, it is claimed as an endorsement of the doctrine of 16 to 1. I do not so view it. There were hundreds of thousands of Democrats in the land who voted the Democratic ticket, as I did, because they believed that a Democratic administration was far better for the country than the re-instatement of Republicans in power. Just the same as in 1860 there were thousands and thousands of Democrats who voted the Democratic ticket, not because they endorsed slavery. In 1864 a different condition prevailed, and the Democratic party, for reasons not necessary to relate, did not receive the votes of a great number who were loyal to their party in 1860.

We are living in an age when money seems to be the standard measurement of men and things. There is however, much that is more important for the well-being of mankind than money. It cannot cure all the ills that flesh is heir to, and the love of it and making it the chief object of adulation can do infinite harm.

Between those who worship the golden calf and those who worship the silver calf there is little choice, except that the former idol is looked upon with more favor by the greater mass of the people than the latter, and hence exerts a larger influence.

One of the evils of the day is too much legislation. The idea seems prevalent in the minds of many that every wrong can be righted by making laws.

"A law should be passed to prevent that" is a common remark that one will hear almost daily in every circle of society when anything happens to annoy an individual.

The fact is there are too many laws; a wholesome repeal of a large number would redound to the benefit of the country. People should realize that man cannot be made wise, virtuous, honest, temperate nor industrious by law, and that the business of the commercial world cannot be controlled contrary to the natural laws of trade. The fundamental principles of Democracy teach this, and are opposed

to centralization and to a paternal form of government, encourage all to independence and not to look to some governmental power to provide them with their daily bread and prevent them from wrong-doing and error.

Believing that while the Democratic party retains the silver issue as an article of faith it will not regain the confidence of the people and be placed in control of the government, I shall do my best to prevent it.

Out of the plan of government adopted for this republic has evolved party organization, the two existing great parties serving as a check upon each other.

At no time during the history of the Democratic party has it been more important to stand for the true principles of its faith. Its opponent, the Republican party, is the creator of trusts and special privileges and the champion of centralized power. Its fundamental principles are and have been those of a monarchy instead of a republic, because it has always legislated for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many.

To combat such an organization and prevent the spread of its doctrines is and should be the mission of the Democratic party. In my judgment those ancient principles of our party which shield the people from the aggressions of trusts, monopolies and tyranny are obscured and dwarfed by the dominant position now assigned to silver.

Many editorials, open and personal letters have come to me within a few weeks in reference to my position upon the subjects discussed in this letter, and as I cannot undertake a separate answer to each, this must be accepted as my answer to them all.

Respectfully yours,

E. C. WALL.

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